

Centre for Food Safety announces test results of Lunar New Year food (second phase)

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department today (February 6) announced the test results of a recently completed seasonal food surveillance project on Lunar New Year (LNY) food (second phase). The test results of around 180 samples collected were satisfactory except for one sample that was announced earlier.

A spokesman for the CFS said, "The CFS has conducted this seasonal food surveillance project in two phases and the first-phase test results were announced last month. With the LNY around the corner, the CFS has completed the second phase of the surveillance project on LNY food. Steamed puddings (e.g. turnip puddings and festive cakes), fried dumplings (e.g. sesame balls and crispy triangles), candies, glutinous rice balls, nuts, pistachio nuts, melon seeds and dried aquatic products were collected from different retailers (including online retailers) for chemical analysis. Chemical tests targeted preservatives, colouring matters, antioxidants, veterinary drug residue, etc."

The unsatisfactory food sample was a candied lotus seed sample detected with sulphur dioxide at a level exceeding the legal limit. The CFS has taken follow-up action on the above-mentioned unsatisfactory sample including informing the vendor concerned of the test result, instructing them to stop selling the affected food item, and tracing the source of the food item in question.

The spokesman urged the food trade to comply with the relevant laws and regulations in the preparation of food and production of labels. They should follow Good Manufacturing Practice and use permitted food additives only in an appropriate manner. Retailers should source food from reliable suppliers, and conduct quality checks of incoming materials and end products to ensure that ingredients used are within legal standards. In addition, the food trade should maintain proper records in accordance with the requirements of the Food Safety Ordinance to allow source tracing if needed.

The spokesman also advised consumers to buy LNY food from reliable retailers with good hygiene conditions; make sure the packaging of prepackaged cakes and snacks is intact and the products have not expired; refer to the nutrition labels on the sugar, salt (sodium) and fat content, etc, for making healthy choices; and pay attention to the hygiene conditions of food containers and the personal hygiene of staff when buying loose-packed food (e.g. candied lotus seeds, nuts and melon seeds).

"Consumers should choose food products with natural colours. Bright white pistachios may have been bleached and melon seeds with unnatural gloss may have had mineral oil added. Consumption of these food products can cause

gastrointestinal discomfort," the spokesman said.

"Festive cakes that are not for immediate consumption should be kept refrigerated or stored according to the instructions on the package, and should be eaten before they expire. Reheat hot-served food thoroughly before consumption, consume it as soon as possible and avoid prolonged exposure of the food at room temperature. Nuts and melon seeds should not be kept for a long time, and those with mould or an abnormal smell or taste should not be eaten," he added.

The spokesman reminded members of the public to maintain a balanced diet and avoid excessive consumption of LNY food that is high in energy, sugar, salt or fat.

Please visit the CFS website (www.cfs.gov.hk/seasonalfood) for more food safety information about seasonal food.